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**Terrorists Leave Strategically Important Syrian City as Army Regains Control**

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On Monday, the Russian Defense Ministry reported on the organized withdrawal of more than 400 terrorists and members of their families from the northwestern suburb of Syrian Homs. The al-Wyer district remains, in fact, the last stronghold of the armed opposition in this administrative center of the country's largest province.



[Syria to Consider Any Military Op Without Gov't Approval As 'Invasion', Including Raqqa Campaign - Assad -- © REUTERS/ Rodi Said](#)

“Withdrawal was preceded by almost a month of tense negotiations because the terrorists put forward their conditions while the Reconciliation Center and Syrian side put forward others,” said Lieutenant General Aleksey Kim, head of the Russian Center for the Reconciliation of Warring Parties in Syria.

He added that it was necessary to come to a common denominator so that both sides were satisfied with the fulfillment of these requirements. The negotiation process was very difficult.

According to the center, the [terrorists](#) who have not yet left al-Wayer are also preparing to lay down their arms. Many of them will go to militia or replenish the ranks of the Syrian police in the framework of amnesty announced by the Syrian president.

The military experts have said that total control by Damascus over this city is a major strategic success for Bashar al-Assad and diplomatic for the Russian negotiators.

### **Importance of Homs**

Only a glance on the map is enough to understand the geographical importance of Homs, the third largest city in Syria with a pre-war population of 900,000 people.

It occupies a strategically important intersection at the crossing of major highways. These traffic routes connect [Damascus](#) (in the south), the Hama province, Idlib and Aleppo (in the north), the Tartus and Latakia provinces (in the west), and Palmyra and Deir ez-Zor (in the east).

“Full control over Homs will significantly protect the movement of humanitarian and military convoys all along the Damascus-Aleppo road which is more than 350 kilometers from north to south,” Anatoly Tsyganok, the head of Center for Military Forecasting told Sputnik.

The militants present in al-Wayer had an opportunity to conduct sabotage activities against government troops both in the [city and on the highway](#). The Syrian military forces going north repeatedly moved through this site and were killed in an ambush because of such improvised explosive devices.



[More Than 35 Killed in Suicide Attack on Military Facilities in Syrian Homs](#) © Sputnik/ Ilya Pitalev

Homs has great value not only as an important transportation hub. This city is a large industrial center. It houses an oil refinery and several oil storage facilities. From Homs to Damascus and from Aleppo to Latakia there are pipelines.

In addition, before the war the city was one of the largest agricultural centers of Syria. Corn, cotton, wheat, vegetables and fruits were grown here. Right now most of the infrastructure is destroyed but its restoration is the key to economic, food and [fuel-energy security](#) of the whole country.

### **City of revolution**

Homs also has strong political significance. It was one of the first cities where in July 2011 clashes with government forces broke out and therefore the city received a nickname: “capital of the revolution.”

The terrorists had planned to use Homs as a main platform for attacking Damascus from the north. Full-scale fighting in this city did not cease for years and became one of the most violent during the Syrian civil war.

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[First Group of Militants to Leave Last Bastion in Syria's Homs on March 18 -- © Sputnik/ Mikhail Voskresenskiy](#)

The city lies in ruins as the majority of its residents escaped the war zone. In particular, Christian communities left the city with more than 138,000 people. Government forces managed to take Homs under control only in May 2014 but in a number of areas (including al-Wayer) the terrorists continued to be active in the years to come.

Anatoly Tsyganok said that fighting in Homs with varying degrees of intensity has been going on for six years now and the fact that the remaining members of the armed opposition in the city voluntarily left is a great success for the [negotiating group](#) which consists of Russian officers.

"This is an achievement for our diplomats as well and it became known right after the third round of talks on the Syrian settlement in Astana in mid-March regarding the withdrawal of 400 militants from [Homs](#). Although there was no opposition it is obvious that they reached a number of agreements with them," Tsyganok said.

According to the head, the general situation in Syria gives cautious optimism. As the expert stressed, in recent years support of the so-called "moderate opposition" from European states has noticeably weakened.

In turn, interaction on the Syrian issue between Russia, Turkey and Iran is strengthening. The government troops that took Aleppo and regained control over Palmyra received a break and were able to free up considerable forces and resources for possible actions in other directions.

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